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**All in Bain: Lost Voices in the Development  
of Management Research**

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**Abstract**

This paper argues that in many fundamental respects management research has lost its way. The growth of Managerialism, particularly in the Public Sector has seen the language of management permeate all aspects of society. There are now few organisations where professional managers are not represented at the top of the organisation and where control is now exerted over professional providers.

This paper looks back at the Bain report submissions and analyses the extent to which management academics represent society and the diversity of society.

The paper highlights a number of ‘silences’ we see as indicative of a wider range of areas which managers might need to address. Our conclusions are that management research as currently conceptualised is impoverished.

## **Introduction**

Management books are now best sellers, sold in academic bookshops and railway stations alike. Authors such as Peters and Waterman(1982), Kantner(1983), and Porter (1991) have been feted as gurus and able to command huge fees for their public performances. Meanwhile writers such as Blanchard and Johnson (1982) have been able to reduce the skills of management to bite size proportions and the Management Charter Initiative to a set of skills you simply tick off as they are achieved. Books are available on how to manage everything from the criminal justice system (Moxon 1985), to the police force (Butler 1984), the National Health Service (Walby and Greenwell 1994) to local government . Whereas MBA's have been spawned in every sector imaginable from ecclesiastical management (Lincoln) to football (Liverpool John Moores).

There appears to be an unwritten rule that if an activity is worth doing, that it needs to be managed to be done better. Management has infiltrated the armed services, engineers, health professionals, social workers and voluntary workers all have to learn the discourse of strategy, economy, efficiency and best value. The government has even introduced a management qualification for headteachers. Management as a degree level subject, although a relatively new field has a presence in more than 85 universities and colleges in the United Kingdom. It is thus tempting to suggest that management and managers have now come of age and there is some truth to the claim made by Burgoyne (199 ) that management is the new transformational force in society. Yet, what concerns us here is what is this thing we call management, what should it be and how well does management, reflect the society it portraits to represent.

As Charles (1994) argues the role of managers transcend their hierarchical organisational position.

"The position that managers hold at this stage in the development of industrialised society makes their actions and beliefs critical. The role they play, their location at the heart of organisations, and the increased social power and influence they wield means what they think , say and do has a significant effect on the way that society develops" (Charles, 1994, p.134).

Management has become more than just a job, managers are being given (or taking upon themselves) a critical role in the shaping and reshaping of our society and managers discourse and actions are providing the vehicle by which society is transformed. Increasingly, managers have the power to make a difference. It would seem logical then that managers have access to the most recent and appropriate research upon which to base their decisions and judgements. It is also equally important that those who become managers are able to represent the diversity of interests within society as a whole - rather than some narrow limited and limiting perspective. Management therefore needs to be more than a 'white', 'able-bodied' 'malestream' activity supporting the interests of one narrow strata of society. Similarly management needs to be supported by a research base that reflects the interests, perspectives and aspirations of society as a whole so that managers can be more comprehensively informed about the likely impact of their decisions.

### **The Bain Commission**

There has been for some time a concern for the quality of management research undertaken in Britain. In 1998/9 the number of successful submissions to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) dropped to a mere 4% compared to 25/29% in Economics and Psychology respectively. Back in 1993 under the aegis of the ESRC the Commission on Management Research was established and chaired by Professor George Bain, the then Director of the London Business School. In the preface to his report he stated that:

"Concern has been expressed for some time about the quality of much management research, about the arrangements for funding, and about the need to strengthen the research culture in business schools and departments in the United Kingdom". (Bain, 1993)

As the quote indicates there was an inherent assumption that management research was of poor quality and the commission was established to rectify this situation. As such the Bain Report (1994) can be viewed as an authoritative exposition of the state of management research and as a powerful commentary of what was to be accepted as quality research in the future.

The 1992 University Funding Council (RAE) selectivity exercise identified 2000 researchers from Business and Management departments funded to the tune of £20m and producing some 6000 publications per year. Twelve of these institutions (14%) gained grade 4 or 5 status in the 1996 RAE exercise. The purpose of the Commission then was to look at ways in which this situation could be improved.

The Commission's final report entitled 'Building Partnerships: Enhancing the Quality of Management Research' was published in 1994. Prior to this (1993) the Commission had published a 12-page summary of the statements of evidence from the 98 submissions. This report although short on analysis and critical reflection did establish a paramountcy principle:

"All management research should ultimately aim to improve the understanding and practice of managers" (1993b, p.7).

This apparently useful statement is problematical as it fails to clearly define the concept of ultimate. Linked to this is the dilemma of who will be the judge of just what is good management and whether a manager's understanding has been developed and their practice improved? One potential explanation is offered when the Commission volunteers:

"The distinctive contribution of management research should be, in the long run, improved productivity leading to increased real national wealth and provision of funds for urgent social issues" (1993b, p.7).

This value statement initially appears to offer some attractive and positive outcomes. On closer inspection it is still very general and open to wide interpretation. What, for example, does 'real national wealth' look like? Does this mean a better balance of payments position or a more skilled workforce? Is 'real wealth' only measurable in financial terms or can it be measured and understood more broadly so that it might include for example, health, education or environmental improvements?

Secondly, why is it national wealth alone that is considered? If better practice and understanding can be identified from within the United Kingdom, could not this be useful in developing less developed countries or countries from central and eastern Europe? Surely there is a moral duty for developed countries to provide knowledge

wherever it can most usefully be used? This ethical dimension highlights the second aspect of the distinctive contribution of management research - that of providing funds for urgent social issues.

Again, we see this as problematical. What quantity of funds should be provided and who are the individuals who will decide what exactly are urgent social issues? The perspective taken ignores an inherent contradiction that of management being both a part of the problem as well as part of the solution. The car manufacturers 'image workers' who effectively promote the motor car as an appealing acquisition serve to unwittingly highlight disadvantaged youths disenfranchised position within society. In so doing they contribute to weakening the youths' links to broader society with the result that stealing of cars or joyriding are some of the only ways left to them of participating in the 'good life' (Blagg and Smith, 1989).

Management, of course, hasn't created the problem and the crimes that follow aren't management's responsibility but, the point we make in this paper is that management cannot be a neutral activity and decisions and policies will have both intended and unintended consequences. The result of a more economical and efficient management process may well result in a cheaper product for the customer, but it may also lead to a large number of people being made redundant - externalities to be dealt with by others.

The Commission's answer to ensuring research's distinctive contribution was to advocate a double hurdle of producing management research that was, at the same time, high quality for managers and high quality for researchers. To achieve this dual track they identified five rational preconditions to promote effective partnerships. First, all parties needed to develop a collaborative dialogue and evolve knowledge exchange relationships - perhaps an easier thing to say than to do.

Secondly, the Commission advocated academics developed research on topics of critical importance to organisations and the practice of management. This second precondition reaffirms the previously identified paramountcy principle but, gives no indication of what are the topics of critical importance to research. Managers, most certainly are one group who can claim to have a legitimate view, but as we illustrated earlier they may not be the only ones.

Thirdly, the Commission calls for all users of management research to be committed to academic independence and have the freedom to produce and publish results irrespective of who pays. This of course is an ideal situation that shows no awareness of the politics of research, particularly within the management field. Funders do give access to researchers, but organisations will not willingly agree to the publication of research which shows them in a poor light or might result in the loss of their competitive advantage. Funders are unlikely to be purely altruistic interested in all aspects of research preferring to restrict themselves to those aspects that they see as the most crucial for the maintenance of profit.

The Commission also requested that academic results should be communicated in a language that was both accessible for managers and academics. This is a plea with which we heartily concur, but we still question exactly to whom is it to be communicated, how it is to be communicated and how will the communication be received?

This relates back to the dual track - there may be two audiences, and the language may differ one between the other, but the point here is that we should attempt to address both. This will require researchers to publish their results in research journals, but also to perhaps write alternative versions, which may include executive summaries for professional or practitioner audiences as well as identify alternative media to target specific audiences.

Lastly, the Commission exhorted managers to provide researchers access, to work with them and to examine ways in which research results could be used to develop policy and practice. This recommendation stems directly from the Commission's acknowledgement that:

"Management research still does not make enough impact on users and thus on management practice. But its capacity to do so is not in doubt". (1994, p.5)

This five prerequisites for the mutual understanding of the needs of management research through greater dialogue can be seen as an ideal. They produced a rationale for potential partnerships between managers and researchers and led the way for the



requirements of 'client' or user support for research for the ESRC. However, this view assumes that both parties are rational and have a mutual interest in promoting management research. In practice this is often difficult as managers and researchers often have different agendas and ideas about what they want and what may be required, notwithstanding the different views the parties might have as to what counts as robust research.

The Commissions distillation and selection of views was based on an amalgamation of the submissions from academia, industry and, professional organisations but the decisions as of whose views to select and whose to ignore was a sole responsibility of the Commissions. It is wrong to believe the Commission acted as neutral arbiters, the Commissions members were all selected on the grounds they had something to contribute to the debate. The Commission did not approach its task in ignorance and is thus accountable for the narrative of management research contained within its final report. The choice of which views to select and which to reject represents a mobilisation of bias (Schettschnieder, 1960). As such, the Commissions portrayal of management research delineates an exercise in power. The Commission has sought, through the authority of its membership and its sponsor to articulate what constitutes management research, and by implication, what is not. The Commissions' view thus seeks to shape perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that there is no alternative view. Conflict is ruled out, compliance is assured and the Commission's view becomes the accepted norm from which others have to operate.

### **Tranfield and Starkey**

Recently, David C Wilson, past chairman, British Academy of Management (BAM) outlined the work of Tranfield and Starkey (Wilson, 1998) as representing the summation of work by BAM into the nature of management research. In this paper Wilson argued that their work challenges us all to consider for whom and for what management research was conducted.

Tranfield and Starkey (1998) acknowledge that there has been a surprising lack of available academic tools to facilitate understanding about the nature of management research. They note that:

"Probably the most striking feature on which there is consensus within the discipline is that management research operates no single agreed ontological or epistemological paradigm. It is a heterogeneous and fragmented field (Whitely, 1984; Tsoukas, 1994) utilising knowledge and research methods drawn from associated disciplines in the social sciences" (Tranfield and Starkey, 1998, p. 345).

Thus, according to Biglan (1973) and the Tranfield and Starkey analysis; management as a discipline exhibits soft characteristics as there is no unifying paradigm but rather a set of competing ones. Furthermore management research is characterised as both 'knowing what' and 'knowing how'. Traditionally, pure disciplines have been more concerned with knowledge rather than its application and have mapped their area of study cumulatively and logically. In applied disciplines this mapping has been more pragmatic, less cumulative and often achieved by a process of building from case studies 'bottom up'. As a consequence management research was argued as being an applied discipline. This is very much in keeping with the paramountcy principle identified by the Commission on Management Research.

Alongside Biglan's cognitive dimensions Tranfield and Starkey also introduce Becher's (1989) dimensions related to the social organisation of knowledge. In particular they focus on the 'convergent versus divergent' and the 'urban versus rural' continuums. Convergent disciplines they describe as displaying a sense of unity, shared purpose, ideology and values, which are missing from divergent disciplines. The urban to rural dimension is reflected in what is described as the people to problem ratio. Urban environments are characterised by large number of researchers addressing a narrow area of study, and rural environments are those where there is a wide area of study, with no clear demarcation lines and where only sparse communication exists between researchers.

These dimensions locate management research as a soft, applied, divergent and urban discipline, similar to engineering in the physical sciences or medicine in the biological

sciences. At this point Tranfield and Starkey (1998) introduce the work of Gibbons et al.

Gibbons et al (1994) have claimed that a transformation in the mode of knowledge production exists and although their work has been predominately focused on the natural sciences it is argued that the concepts and ideas are transferable to the social sciences and humanities. However they neither historically nor socially locate how this new knowledge production has emerged. In their schema knowledge production is split into two ideal types: Mode 1 and Mode 2.

Mode 1 is portrayed as being governed largely by the academic community, a single discipline homogenous and hierarchical. Mode 2 is seen as being carried out at the point of application, is transdisciplinary, heterogeneous, more heterarchical and transient whilst it's quality control structures are more accountable and reflexive. The argument made here is that management research can be identified as a potential area of activity for the development of Mode 2. This model is summarised in the table below.

### **Key Characteristics of Mode 1 and Mode 2 Knowledge Production**

Key Characteristics	Mode 1	Mode 2
Context governed by	Academic community	Application
Discipline	Single	Transdisciplinary
Nature	Homogeneity	Heterogeneity
Organisation	Hierarchical	Heterarchical
Quality control	Less socially accountable	More socially accountable reflexive
Preferred research style	Single researcher	Collaborative research from different disciplines

A major feature made of the Mode 2 is the notion of transdisciplinary. In the Commission's statements of evidence, management research was identified as; disciplinary, multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary, but they did not mention transdisciplinary. Transdisciplinarity has four key features. Firstly, it represents a distinct and developing framework that guides problem solving efforts which are generated and underpinned by their practical nature. Secondly, problem solutions will contain both empirical and theoretical components and as such will represent a contribution to knowledge, although this may not necessarily be disciplinary knowledge. Thirdly, research results are initially accomplished through the process of their production and subsequent diffusion occurs as the original practitioners move on to new problem contexts. Lastly, transdisciplinary research is dynamic, a particular solution within one discipline may lead to connections being made in other disciplines.

Tranfield and Starkey argue transdisciplinarity is a critical requirement for management research:

“Transdisciplinarity needs to be central to management research for it is also central to the practice of management“ (p.352, 1988).

They go on to produce 6 key propositions. As management research is transdisciplinary it will be irreducible to any one single discipline, but they accept that at this early stage of development much debate will be required to differentiate between the core and the peripheral aspects of the discipline. Management research is quintessentially non-

reductionist, diversity rather than be seen as problematic should be embraced. Management research needs to promote a dialogue that is cross-cultural rather than one that maintains a strict adherence to the 'American experience'. The notion of transdisciplinarity deserves much greater exploration in the context of management research. Finally, a distinguishing characteristic of management research is its applied nature and the need for research to simultaneously engage both the world of practice and the world of theory.

It is worth mentioning here that the Research Assessment Exercise 1996 had only a negligible number of reported submissions that used a multi-disciplinary approach. But there are problems and even sympathetic voices strike a cautioning note. There are those that believe that the detailed knowledge of issues will only reside with those working and researching at one might call the 'coal face'. It will not be practical or reasonable for these individuals to be working within more than one discipline.

The challenge then arises as to how their detailed insights can be raised to transdisciplinary status. Burgoyne (1995) believes that even multidisciplinary research to be impossible. For Burgoyne different disciplines have very different methodologies, epistemologies, ways of understanding the world and even problematics which are often incommensurate. Difficulties, he observes, are always experienced in trying to identify such things as a common language and he argues that perhaps the best that can be hoped for is some kind of 'touching points' between different disciplines. Burgoyne accepts that researchers can obtain a number of different perspectives on the same problem, but it is very difficult if not impossible to totally integrate these different perspectives without one of the disciplines subsuming the others and providing the organising and interpreting framework into which the others will need to fit. Also, In periods of uncertainty it is likely that researchers will return to their primary discipline and in the current atmosphere of league tables and regulation there exists an unhealthy climate where academics and managers play safe. Burgoyne's claims about the difficulties of multi-disciplinary research do ring true, but that does not make its pursuit impossible, and if we are to continue to push to aim to develop beyond the boundaries of the traditional disciplines how will progress ever be made?

What neither the Commission or Tranfield and Starkey is successfully identifying is who is management research for, and whether its role is for the maintenance of the status quo or the transformation of society this leads us onto the next section.

### **Who Are the Customers of Management Research?**

Both Bain and Tranfield and Starkey identify management research as an applied science and a practical activity. Both make it clear that management research will only have meaning if it helps managers to better understand what they are doing and enables them to do it more effectively. Bain talks of the importance of partnership whilst Tranfield and Starkey note that Mode 2 is characterised as a more socially accountable knowledge production process, involving continuous coupling arrangements between academics, policy-makers and practitioners around problems or themes. Neither the Commission nor Tranfield and Starkey's important contributions to the nature of management research critically questions who are the customers of this research or , who should be? It is perhaps thought to be too obvious. Reading both papers it is clear that neither seeks to question in any wider sense the intended recipients of management research and whether we are broadening the base on a redefinition of management or aiming to maintain its status quo. We don't see this as a technical question of targeting, but rather an ethical one. It is at this point that the notion of silences becomes relevant.

### **Silences**

This notion of silences is illustrative and is meant to signify groups who are not traditionally represented by managers and for whom management might be viewed as a political process to maintain the status quo. Two such exemplars used in a previous study (McLaughlin, 1997) are race and disability. Among others which could equally demonstrate the same points include: women, the unemployed or those in third world vis a vis the developed world to demonstrate the same points. As has already been identified by Bain and Tranfield and Starkey management and as a consequence the research that needs to be conducted is primarily for those who are labelled managers. If

the group by which individuals are defined as managers is narrow and unrepresentative of for example black or disabled managers, then assuming there are no other relevant differences to explain this underrepresentation, management research can be seen to be inherently political and as a means of promoting the interests of the status quo at the expense of encouraging diversity in research or practice.

## **Race**

It is, of course, impossible to discuss black managers perspective without mentioning race. On careful analysis of the Commission's findings race was only mentioned twice in the ninety seven submissions (Bain,1993).

As Everitt et al. Note:

“Race’ is not real and natural: it is a discourse of values, assumptions, language, theories and practices that come to be experienced as real.” (Everitt et al. 1992, p.21)

These values, assumptions, language, theories, practices and exercises of power are as important to the study of management as they are to any other aspect of human life. Closely connected to the notion of race is the idea of racism, that is the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over another (Lorde, 1984). In Britain racism is about the social construction of social relationships on the basis of an assumed inferiority of non-Anglo-Saxon ethnic minority groups.

Non-Anglo-Saxon minorities refers to all those peoples who are not considered as ‘indigenous’ British of white English and Nordic European origins, currently settled in Britain. In particular this example focuses on black people, that is those of Asian, African and Caribbean descent who suffer the most pernicious and intractable expressions of racism today (Hugman, 1991; Solomos, 1993). The impact of racism results in clear differences of achievement of black children in education (Carr-Hill and Chadra-Boreham,1990), crime (Willis, 1985), housing (Bryan et al. 1985), access to social services (Butt, 1994) healthcare (Grimsley and Bhat, 1990) and unemployment opportunities.

“Black people in the UK are more likely to be unemployed than white people, and when they are employed are more likely to have jobs which are lower paid and lower status in comparison to white people.... With few exceptions sociologists of organisations and of the professions have tended to ignore racism” (Hugman, 1991, p.146).

Coulshed presents an interesting perspective on this:

“Recently in a lecture I asked students to reflect on the experiences of black managers; all, including some black students, declared that since they did not know of any they found it difficult to imagine what some of the issues would be” (Coulshed, 1990, p.153).

It could be argued that Coulshed’s students lacked imagination, but the point is made, there are very few black managers. There are of course a number of reasons for this, including individual, institutional and cultural racism (Dominelli, 1988).

Individual racism can be defined as those attitudes and behaviours that indicate prejudgement of racial groups in a negative way. Individual racist attitudes, without institutional backing represent racial prejudice. Institutional racism, consists of the pervasive customary routines which ration resources and power by excluding ‘racially inferior’ groups. Institutional racism pathologises these excluded groups for their lack of success within the system and blames them for the predicament. Thus the reproduction of racism through the interaction of individual behaviour and institutional norms forms the dynamics of institutionalised racism.

Cultural racism is centred around those values and beliefs, endorsing the superiority of white culture. Such, cultural racism supports and reinforces both individual and institutional racism. This section has focused on the issue of why there are so few black managers as an example of the questions to be asked as to how race crosscuts with management practice. Management research has tended to deny the existence of race, or at best to view race as a variable to be controlled. Frie (1962) emphasises the importance of the free market leads to a view whereby individuals overrides personal discrimination, whilst (Friedman, 1962) analysis of neo-Conservatives suggests they believe that Black people represent a threat to national unity resulting from the cultural differences of the Black communities and their refusal to be assimilated into white British culture. Forced assimilation or repatriation then becomes the solution to the



problem. This type of view reflects the part played by Black workers in maintaining profitability through low labour costs was the main reason for capitalism's need for Commonwealth labour in the 1960's. Nor does it acknowledge a dependency of the National Health Services on overseas workers.

If management seeks to be a transforming force in society, and improvements made only benefit the status quo, management may appear as a metaphor for discrimination and control to those who are so obviously discriminated against by our current structures, stereotypes and social relations. Unless a more inclusive definition is used management research, by virtue of its silence, is far from being an emancipating force it could be and becomes just another example of institutionalised racism, be it through unintentional omission or not. The colour of one's skin does not act as a good predictor of who can be a good manager, but it does act as a bar to becoming one. There is no evidence that black people make bad managers. Yet, our current system leaves a major pool of potential talent untapped, a situation we surely cannot afford to continue.

## **Disability**

Disability is our second exemplar, this has also received scant attention in academic circles in general and management in particular. It has been marginalized, as have disabled people. Recent years have seen the growth of disability studies but this is still in its infancy. It is only in the fields of medicine and psychology that disability has been offered a place. Medical and psychological attention has been at some cost for disabled people. Scientific advances have led to more disabled people surviving longer than ever before through improved diagnosis and better treatments. The negative side of these developments has led to medicine, not only being seen as controlling the disease but, also the person. Finkelstein (1993) has argued that it is the medical model that has dominated disability, dominating current legislation and categorising people into those who will have access to services and benefits and those who will not.

This reliance on medicine is unique to disabled people among minority groups. For example, if an operation was introduced which could turn black people into white

people this could be seen as a means to end discrimination based on colour. However, such an operation would be universally rejected. The position of disability is qualitatively different. Many disabled people might welcome an operation which offered to eliminate their impairment, an operation or treatment would not only remove the focus for impairment but, which could not be replaced with another way of identifying the same group for discrimination. In response to this critical perspective towards the medical model Oliver (1986) has developed a social model of disability. In this model disability represents the loss or limitation of opportunities that prevents people who have impairments from taking part in the normal life of the community on equal terms with others, as a consequence of physical and/or social barriers.

“disability is viewed as a problem located within society rather than with individuals who happen to have impairments . Thus the way to reduce disability is to adjust the physical and social environment to ensure that the needs and rights of people with impairments are met, rather than attempting to change disabled people to fit the existing environment” (French, 1993, p.17).

This view of disability then turns on its head the assumed wisdom that many able-bodied people have of disabled people. Far from seeing disabled people as deserving of pity it identifies them as a socially oppressed group. The question we ask in this paper is, how far does management and management research contribute to this view, wittingly or unwittingly? Does management research question why management practices result in so few people with disabilities becoming employed or why so few disabled people become managers. Venning (1995) notes that the government’s own statistics indicate that disabled people find it up to three times harder than able bodied people to find employment. But, we know from research if they do obtain employment, they are seen as both punctual and diligent.

Oliver (1993) claims that a great deal of research discriminates against disabled people for a number of reasons. Firstly, research on disability has utilised models that are far removed from the experience of disabled people, often to the point where they feel victimised. This has resulted in many disabled people refusing to participate in research

whose design, control and publication is controlled by researchers who are either unaware, or lack understanding of, the social context of disability.

At its extreme supporters of the social model of disability advocate that disabled people should not get involved in research that is directed by this perspective. Whilst we understand this position it is not one we advocate. It does highlight yet again the fact that research is not neutral activity and that unlike physics, the object of study have a voice and that the voice deserves to be heard. It is part of the role of a researcher to agree where possible their research approach is appropriate and that in framing problems all sides are considered, assumptions challenged and outcomes are critically robust. Surely it must be the greatest exercise of power to undertake research in such a way that the challenges from the 'silences' are neither missed nor even considered as worthy of attention. If the voices from the 'silences' are not heard management research can only provide a partial picture and there will be potentially large areas and insights overlooked.

It is interesting to reflect here, whether management research has contributed to the problem or its solution. Managers' failure to recognise and address the potential of disabled people is an example of social exclusion. This practice misses the opportunity for greater inclusion and promoting qualities and competencies that could be brought to bear in enriching employment.

### **Where to Now?**

The paper has so far examined the analysis made by the Commission of Management Research, Tranfield and Starkey's response to the question of the nature of management research and the notion of the existence of silences within management research using race and disability as exemplars. From this it is clear that the notion of management research is problematic. If the concept of Mode 2 is accepted as being that most suited to research then, to be considered are those omitted from our current conceptions of management and who it is that management is representing. Furthermore, if the critique of the silences is accepted then we are left with a view of

management research as essentially political in nature. Hammersley (1995) provides a thought provoking analysis of the political nature of research when he comments:

“Whether research **could** be non-political; whether, in fact research as practised tends to be political; or whether research **should** be political. In other words, it could be a theoretical, an empirical, or a normative question” (*italics in original*) (Hammersley, 1995, p.101).

Traditionally, when such questions are asked there is an assumption that social research cannot but help be political, and as a consequence, it should be explicitly and directly political. Politics, as with research, is a term open to a wide range of interpretations. At one extreme this might range from the issues of dispute between national political parties or nation states, and at the other extreme, micro-political processes are to be found within organisations and between individuals. To all intents and purposes micro-politics is symptomatic of all human relations. To only accept just this latter definition is to make a claim that is rather vacuous and leaves the researcher asking, so what? In this analysis, politics is inextricably linked to the exercise of power, and in social research terms, to making value judgements and undertaking actions on the basis of these judgements.

Research is political in the sense that the funding bodies such as the ESRC will only accept and support certain types of management research. and more recently only research that has user support.

Hammersley (1995) argues that the state funding of research has been overemphasised. This is undoubtedly true, but fails to question why ‘applied’ research is commissioned. It is thus not surprising that Easterby-Smith and Thorpe (1996) claim that management research is essentially political. We need to know who conducts the research, and for what purposes it is to be used and by whom. By introducing the idea of silences into the debate about the nature of research we have sought to question the research status quo. Issues to do with back people, the disabled, women, the unemployed and so on are central to our understanding of management if management is increasingly represented and taking a leading role in all aspects of our society.

We need to begin to unmask the sources of power and oppression that either, wittingly or unwittingly, add to the discrimination and oppression experienced by these groups within society. Research methodologies need to be re-examined and checked for their inherent oppressive biases. A new anti-oppressive understanding of research and research practice needs to be developed.

Research is also political in the sense that it is based on presuppositions. These presuppositions are founded, in part at least, on the cultural values arising from the specific socio-historical locations of individual researchers, including their ethnicity and able-bodiedness. Such knowledge production is in keeping with the requirements for Mode 2, which offers an opportunity to break out of the traditional disciplinary way of thinking.

Finally, research can be seen as political as it has material effects. The research of Miller and Gwynne (1972) was experienced as oppressive to disabled people. Kimmel's (1988) research on the Cambridge Sommerville Youth Study found long term negative consequences that only emerged when an evaluation study was conducted thirty years after the original project.

Nielsen (1990) notes that giving voice to the less powerful will enhance what researchers know by providing access to the experiences of being discriminated and understandings of the behaviours and perspectives of those who oppress. Everitt et al. (1992) believe it is likely the less powerful will become less suspicious of the whole process and may potentially find the process empowering. Such collaboration will be helpful to the researcher in ensuring that the questions asked are both clear and relevant and therefore more likely to receive an answer. In terms of Mode 2 it should be quite possible to ensure that in knowledge development representatives of the 'silences' can be included.

## **Conclusion**

This paper began by noting that management had come of age, and, as commented by some is now a transformational force within society. Managers increasingly hold

influential positions, status and power within society. Managers actions impact upon every aspect of life. It is as a consequence logical that the knowledge developed to inform practice should be of the highest calibre and above all represent the diverse groups managers now represent. Part of the focus of the Bain report was to address this current inadequacy. The Commission established a paramountcy principle of management research ultimately improving the understanding and practice of managers and the twin hurdles of high quality research for managers and academics alike. The Commission also identified the building of partnerships between research users and research providers as a key mechanism whereby the future quality of management research could be ensured. This paper has reviewed the deliberations of the Commission and found them wanting and made a case for aspects of management research that appear to have been overlooked. Much more clarification needs to be done with the conclusions appearing to cloud the nature of research even more through its use of terms like: 'ultimate', 'real national wealth' and 'urgent social issues'.

The paper then developed the theme by examining the recent work of Tranfield and Starkey and their critique of management research as a soft, applied, divergent and urban discipline. Here we focus on their analysis of Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge production. Management is argued to be a potential area of activity for Mode 2 key features of which include: transdisciplinarity, heterogeneity, heterarchical, more socially accountable, collaborative and research governed by application. This idea of transdisciplinarity that Tranfield and Starkey put forward is discussed in detail identifying its potential usefulness in developing the debate on the nature of research. However, we also show the notion of transdisciplinarity as shown to be problematic and not without its difficulties

Our conclusions are that management and management research is impoverished. We argue that the Commission on Management Research missed an opportunity to address this omission. Whilst the Commission has promoted relevance and application it has not fully addressed the continuing absence of a number of important 'silences' within management and in a sense could be viewed as reinforcing, the status quo. The work of Tranfield and Starkey (1998) building on the work of Gibbons et al (1994) (in their suggestion that management can be conceptualised as a potential Mode 2 site for

knowledge production) does we feel offer a way forward, but so far there has either been a failure, or a reluctance to acknowledge the 'silences' that exist within management research. In many ways management research as currently conceived has failed a number of groups and the ones which we highlight here in this paper are only indicative of a number. All groups outside the traditional groups from whom managers are recruited need in our view to see representation and have their voice heard. This is particularly important now as management is now seen as an intrinsic part of life, which has become a more indispensable part of organisational activity. If Hite and McDonald (1995) are to be believed the competitive edge of the future will be found in the potential of our human resources and maximising these positively could hold the key to future performance.

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